



US010437177B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Borenstain et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 10,437,177 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** ***Oct. 8, 2019**

(54) **LIQUID ELECTROPHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTERS**

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- (*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

(21) Appl. No.: **16/254,226**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 22, 2019**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**
US 2019/0155193 A1 May 23, 2019

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 15/748,125, filed as application No. PCT/EP2015/075180 on Oct. 29, 2015, now Pat. No. 10,216,120.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G03G 15/11 (2006.01)
G03G 15/16 (2006.01)
G03G 21/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **G03G 15/1605** (2013.01); **G03G 15/11** (2013.01); **G03G 21/0088** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC .. G03G 15/11; G03G 15/1605; G03G 15/169; G03G 21/0088
See application file for complete search history.

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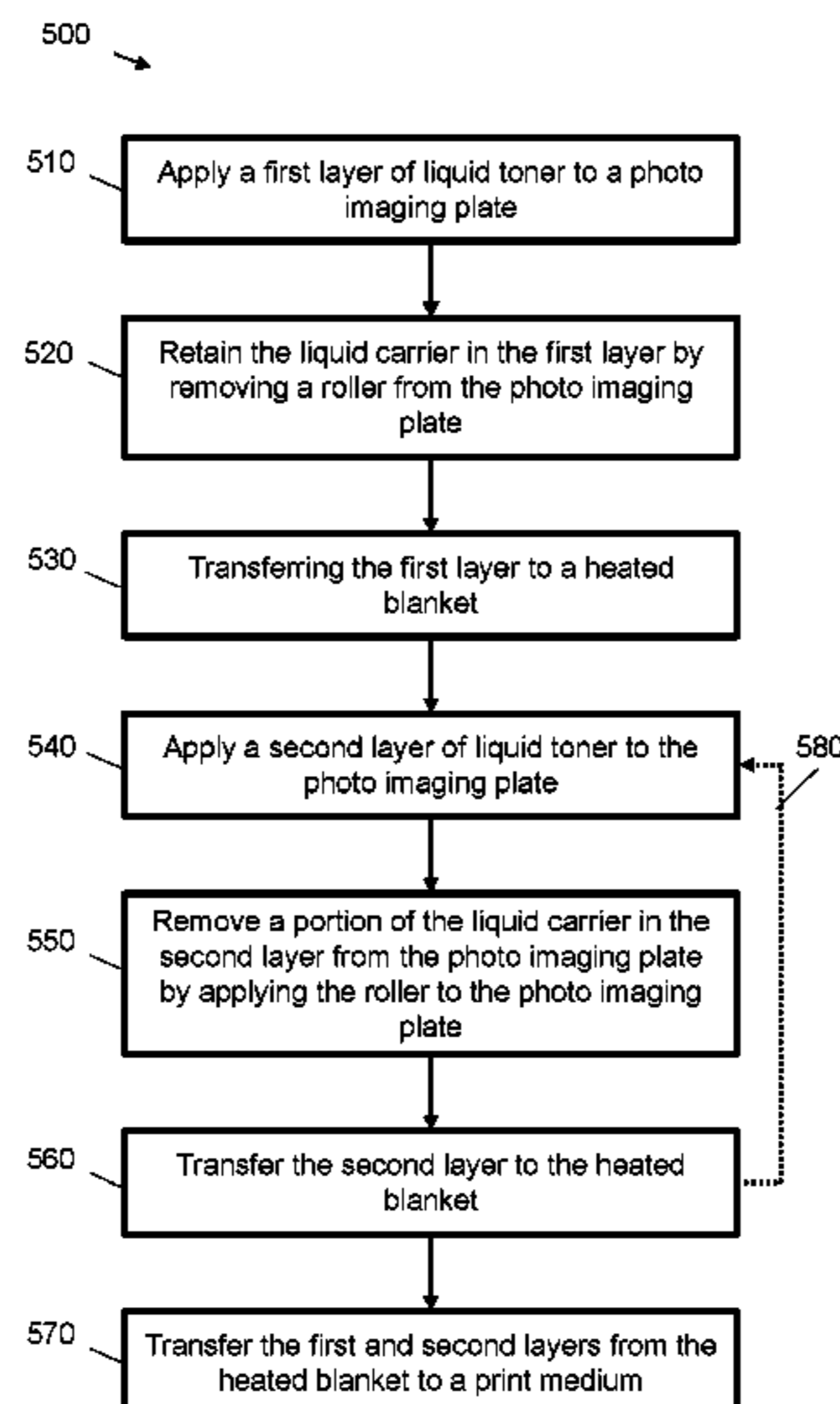
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

In certain examples, a liquid electrophotographic printer has a compressive element. The compressive element removes a portion of carrier liquid from an inked image on an imaging element. The compressive element is selectively engageable and a controller disengages the compressive element for a first layer of liquid toner so as to retain carrier liquid in the first layer, and engages the compressive element for a subsequent layer of liquid toner so as to remove a portion of carrier liquid from the subsequent layer.

18 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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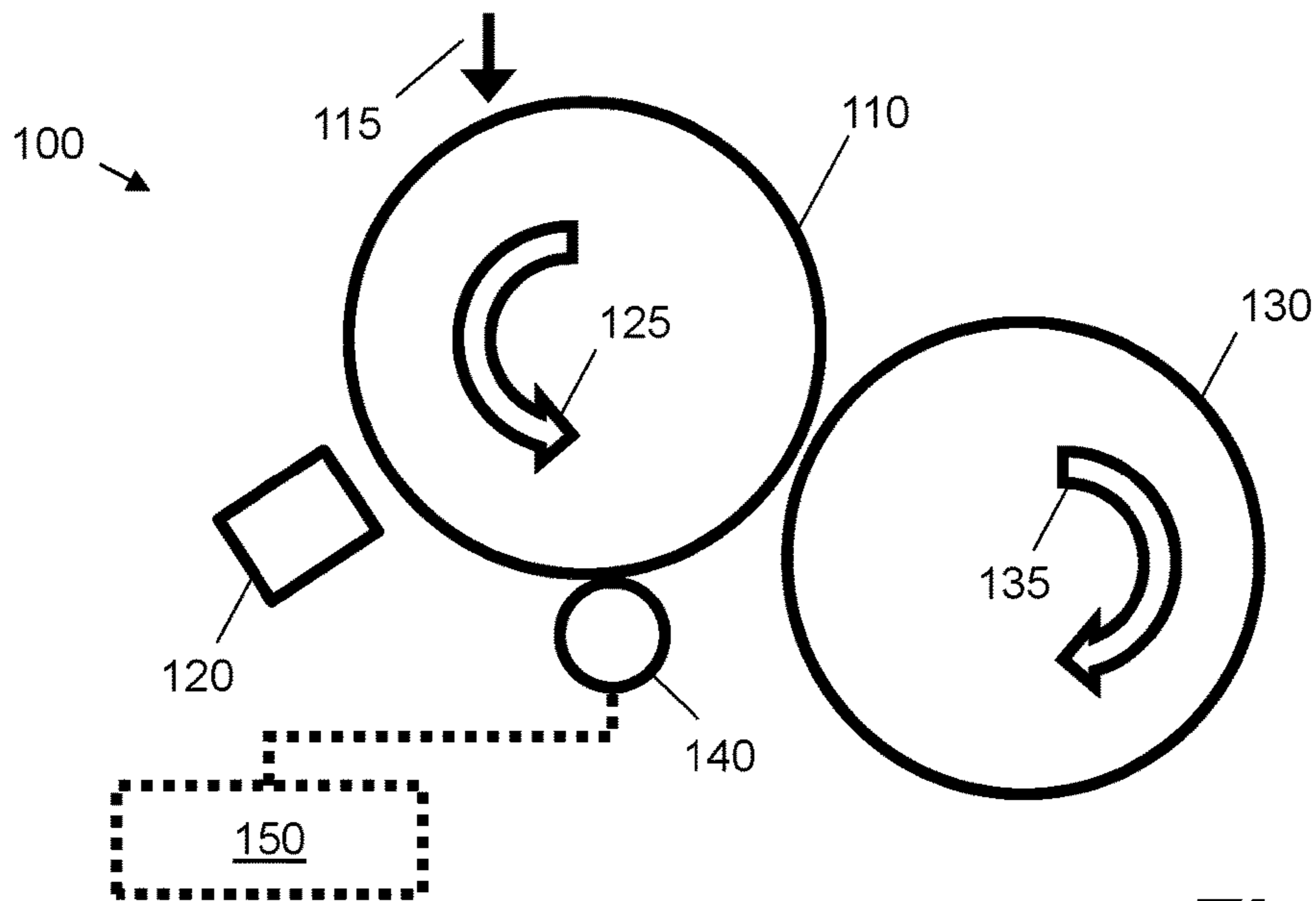


Fig. 1

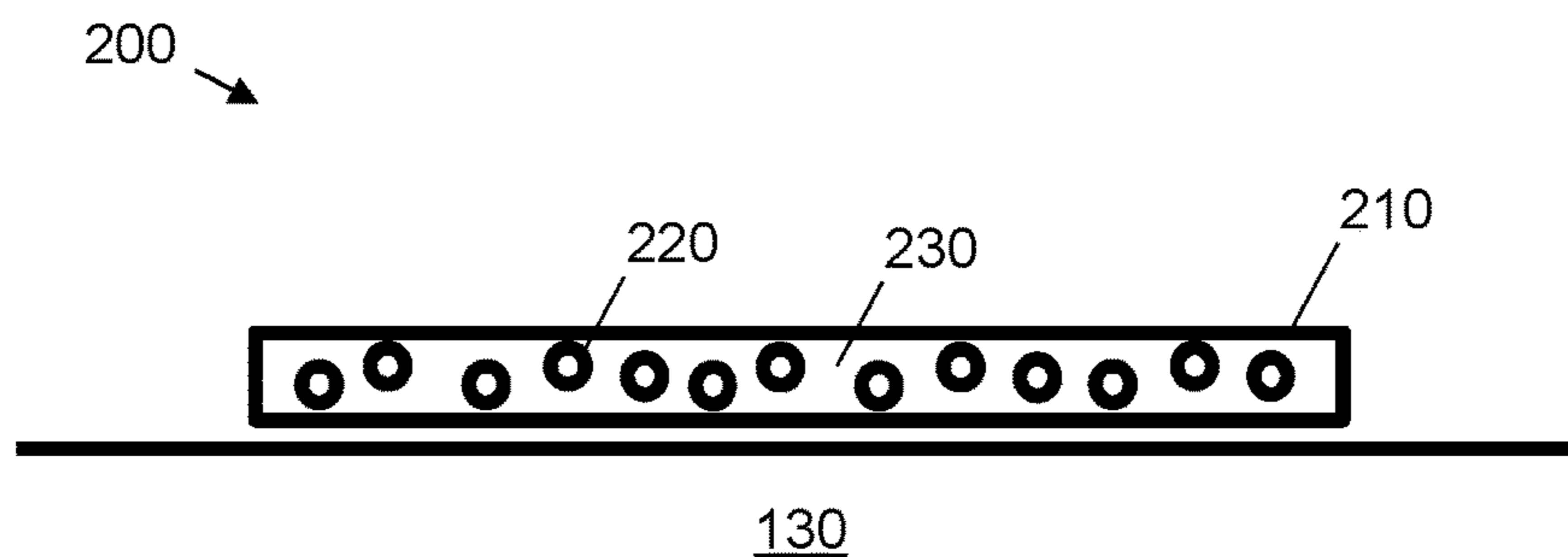


Fig. 2A

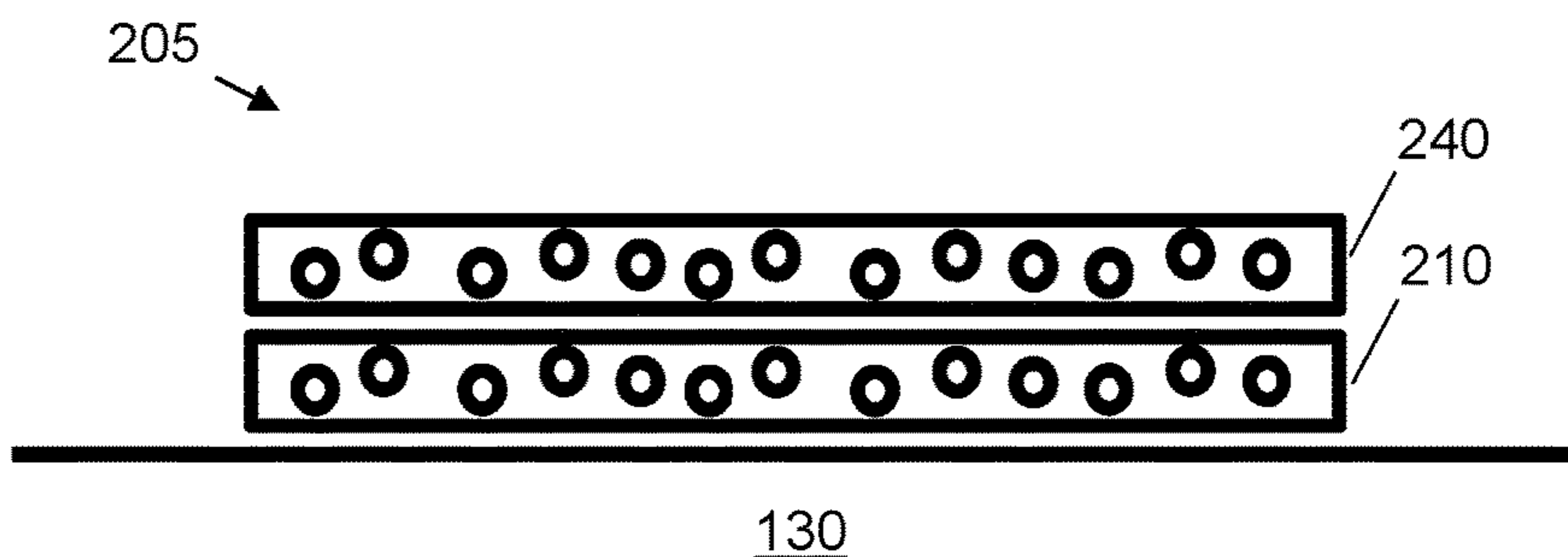


Fig. 2B

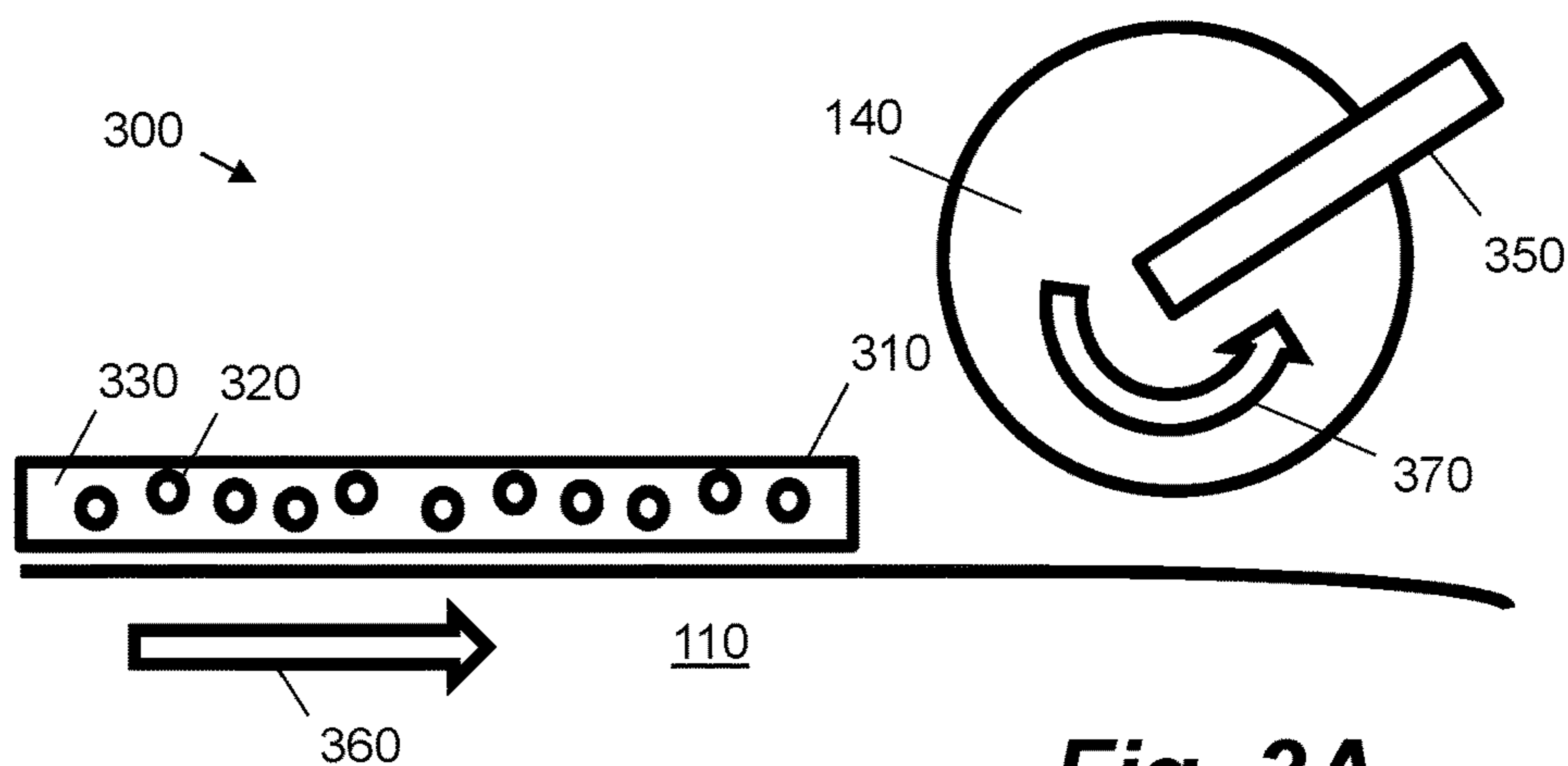


Fig. 3A

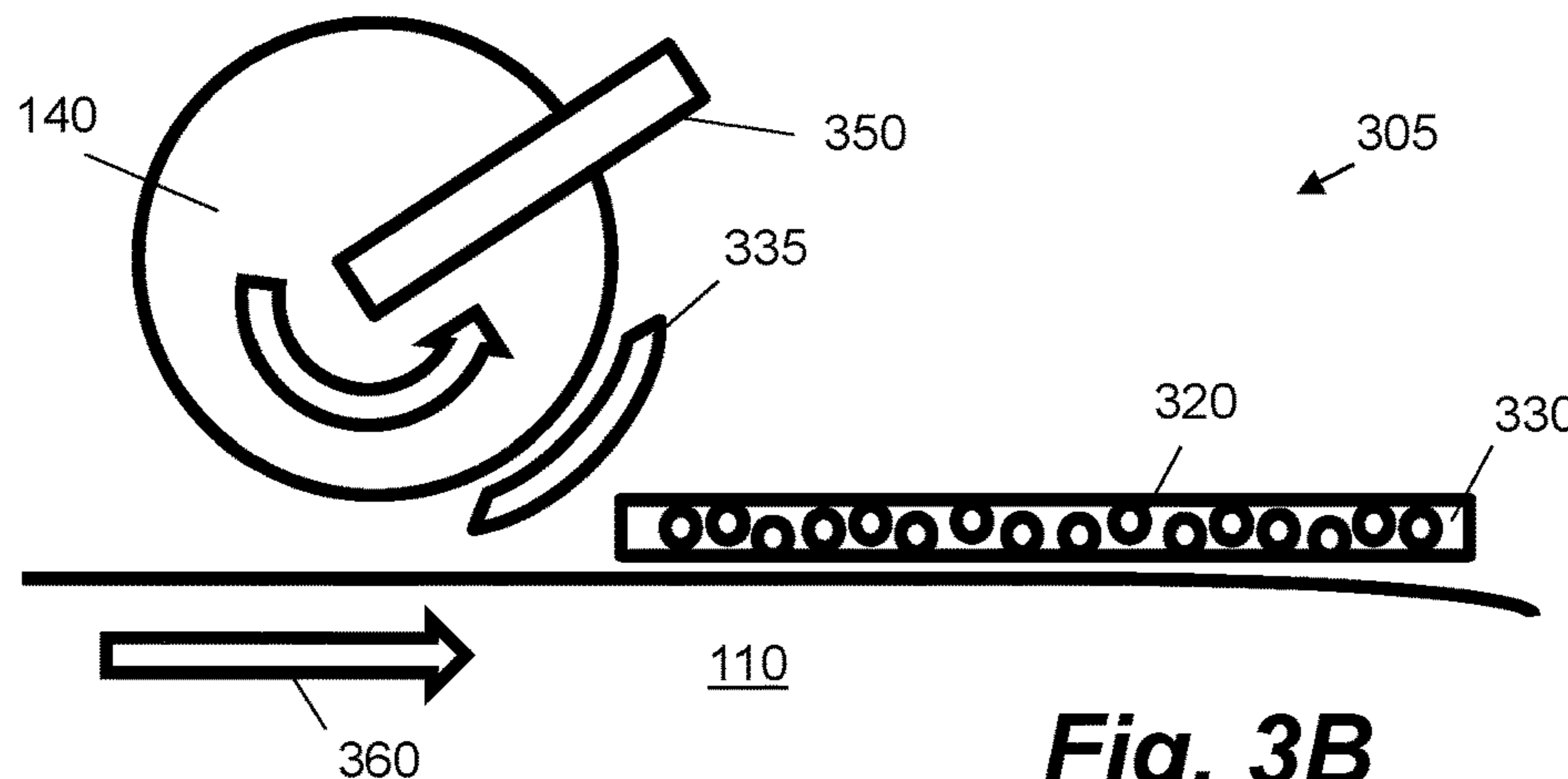


Fig. 3B

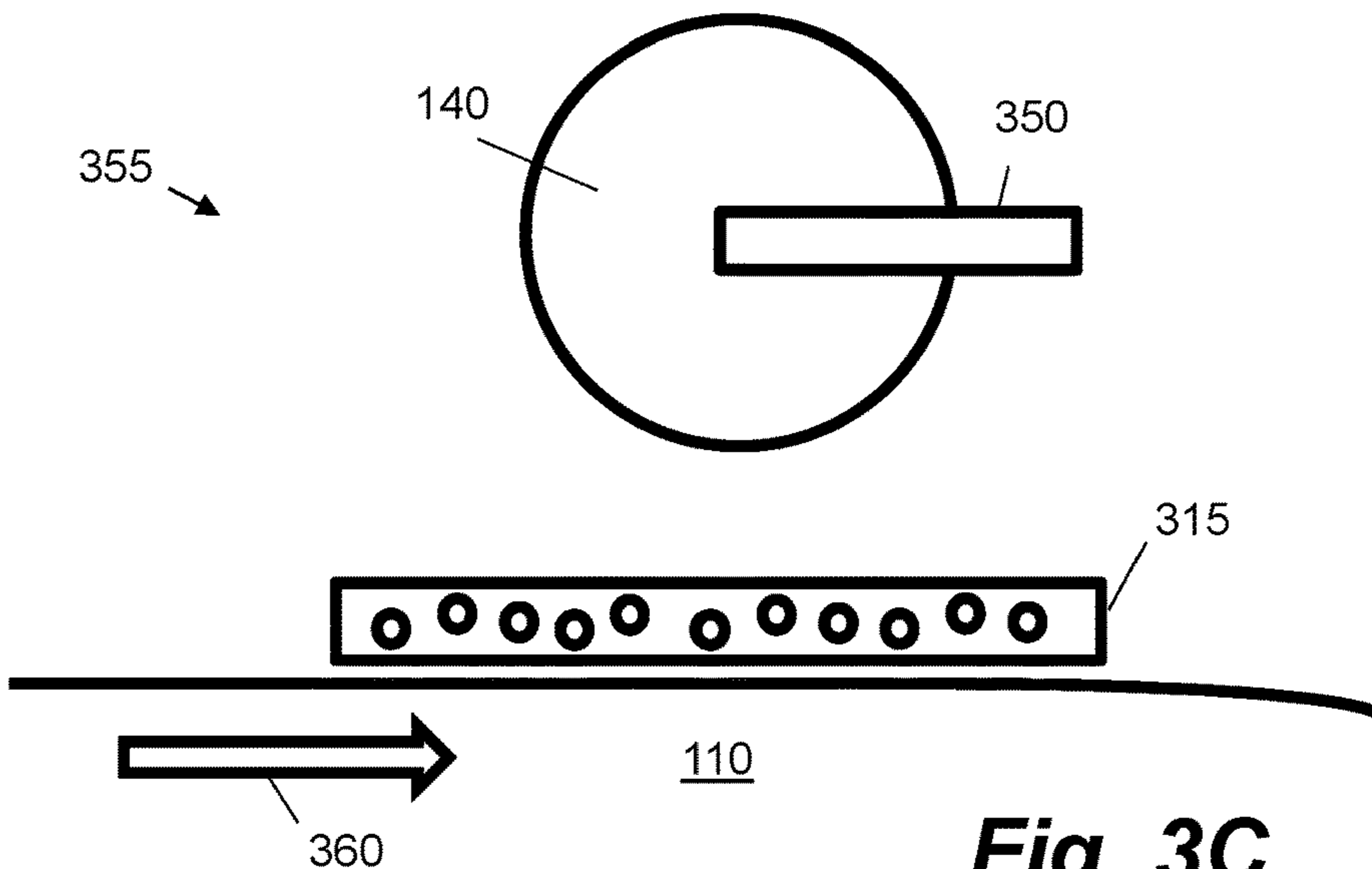


Fig. 3C

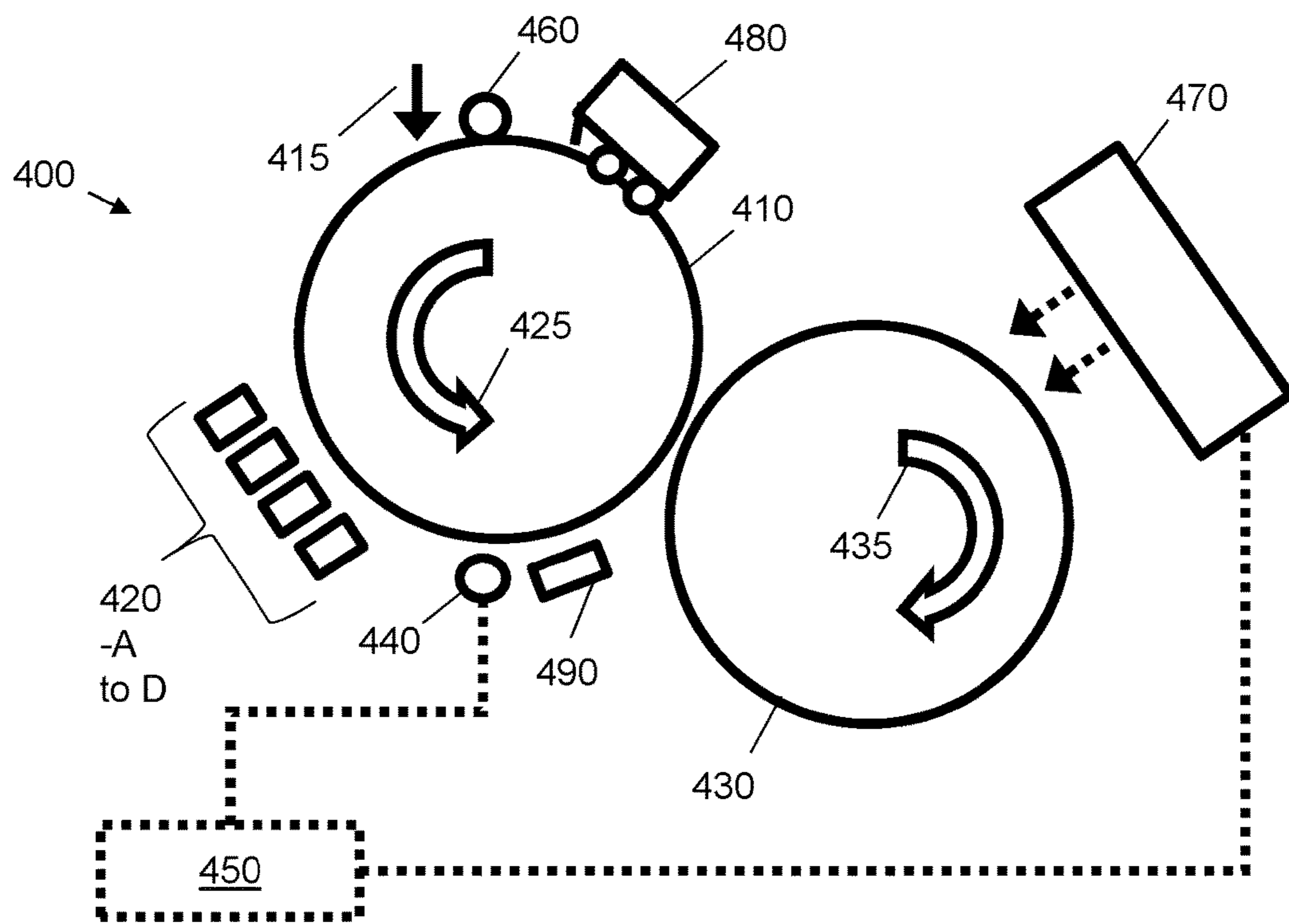


Fig. 4

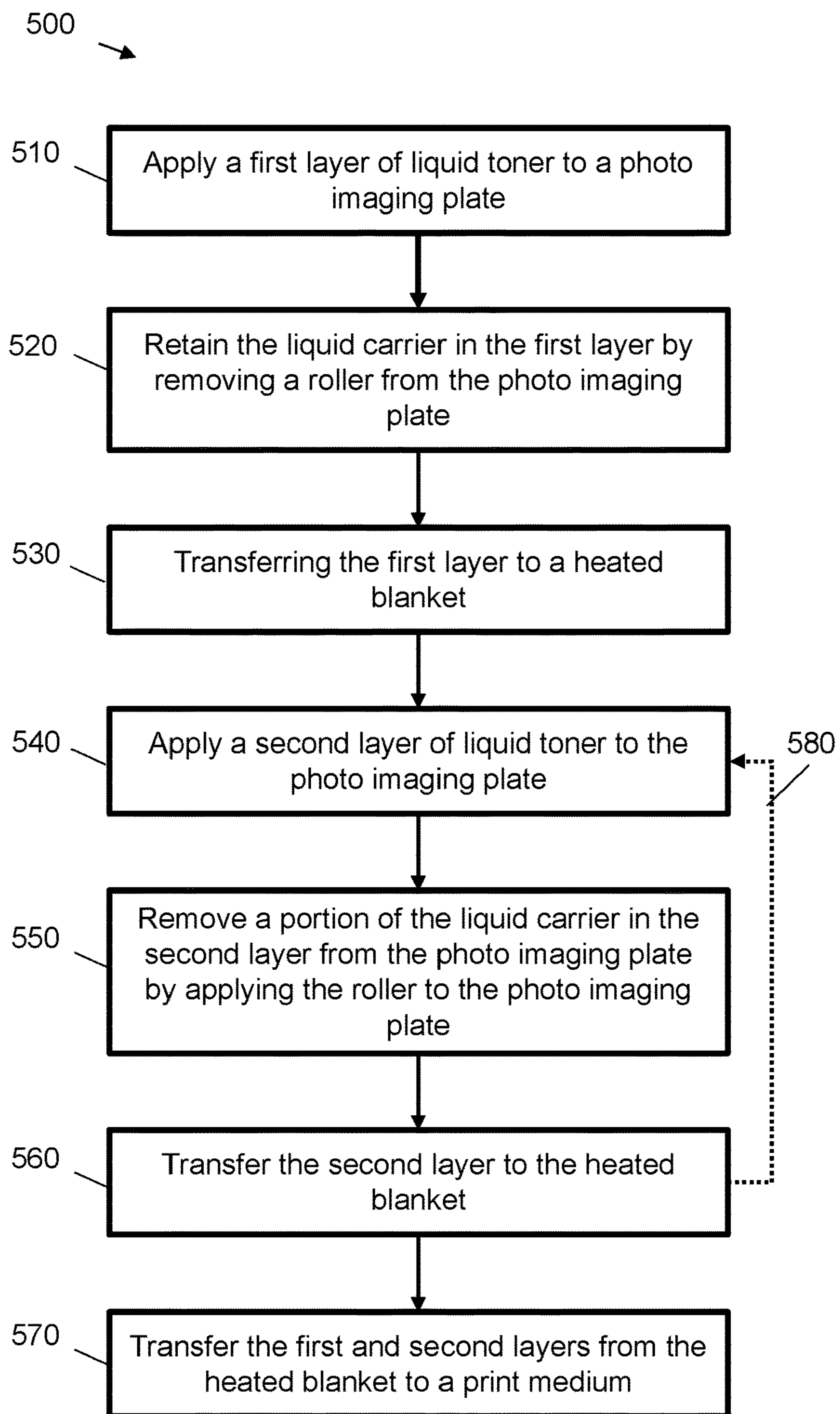


Fig. 5

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LIQUID ELECTROPHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTERS

PRIORITY

This application is a Continuation of commonly assigned and co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/748,125, filed Jan. 26, 2018, which is a national stage filing under 35 U.S.C. § 371 of PCT application number PCT/EP2015/075180, having an international filing date of Oct. 29, 2015, the disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties.

BACKGROUND

Liquid electrophotographic printing, also referred to as liquid electrostatic printing, uses liquid toner to form images on a print medium. A liquid electrophotographic printer may use digitally controlled lasers to create a latent image in the charged surface of an imaging element such as a photo imaging plate. In this process, a uniform static electric charge is applied to the imaging element and the lasers dissipate charge in certain areas creating the latent image in the form of an invisible electrostatic charge pattern conforming to the image to be printed. An electrically charged printing substance, in the form of liquid toner, is then applied and attracted to the partially-charged surface of the imaging element, recreating the desired image.

In certain liquid electrophotographic printers, a transfer element is used to transfer developed liquid toner to a print medium. For example, a developed image, comprising liquid toner aligned according to a latent image, may be transferred from an imaging element to a transfer blanket of a heatable transfer cylinder and from the transfer blanket to a desired substrate, which is placed into contact with the transfer blanket.

At least two different methodologies may be used to print multi-color images on a liquid electrophotographic printer. Both methodologies involve the generation of multiple separations, where each separation is a single-color partial image. When these separations are superimposed they result in the desired full color image being formed. In a first methodology, a color separation layer is generated on the imaging element, transferred to the transfer cylinder and is finally transferred to a substrate. Subsequent color separation layers are similarly formed and are successively transferred to the substrate on top of the previous layer(s). This is sometimes known as a “multi-shot color” imaging sequence. In a second methodology, a “one shot color” process is used. In these systems, the imaging element transfers a succession of separations to the transfer blanket on the transfer cylinder, building up each separation layer on the blanket. Once some number of separations are formed on the transfer blanket, they are all transferred to the substrate together.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various features will be apparent from the detailed description which follows, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which together illustrate, by way of example only, certain examples, and wherein:

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram showing a liquid electrophotographic printer in accordance with an example;

FIG. 2A is a schematic diagram showing a first layer of liquid toner applied to a heatable transfer element in accordance with an example;

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FIG. 2B is a schematic diagram showing a second layer of liquid toner applied on top of the first layer illustrated in FIG. 2A in accordance with an example;

FIG. 3A is a schematic diagram showing a compressive element prior to engaging a layer of liquid toner on a photo imaging plate in accordance with an example;

FIG. 3B is a schematic diagram showing a compressive element after engaging a layer of liquid toner on a photo imaging plate in accordance with an example;

FIG. 3C is a schematic diagram showing a disengaged compressive element for a layer of liquid toner on a photo imaging plate in accordance with an example;

FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram showing a liquid electrophotographic printer comprising a variable air supply in accordance with an example; and

FIG. 5 is a flow diagram showing a method of printing an image in a liquid electrophotographic printer according to an example.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following description, for purposes of explanation, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present systems and methods.

It will be apparent, however, that the present apparatus, systems and methods may be practiced without these specific details. Reference in the specification to “an example” or similar language means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the example is included in at least that one example, but not necessarily in other examples.

As described herein, an example liquid electrophotographic printer comprises an imaging element such as a photo imaging plate (PIP). The imaging element may be implemented as a drum or a belt. A latent image is generated on the imaging element and at least one image development unit deposits a layer of liquid toner onto the imaging element. The liquid toner comprises ink particles and a carrier liquid. The ink or pigment particles are charged and may be arranged upon the imaging element based on a charge pattern of a latent image. Once liquid toner is applied to the latent image on the imaging element, an inked image is formed on the imaging element. The inked image comprises ink particles that are aligned according to the latent image. In one case, the ink particles may be 1-2 microns in diameter. A heatable transfer element, sometimes referred to as an intermediate transfer member, receives the inked image from the imaging element and transfers the inked image to a print substrate. In an example one shot color process, the inked image is one of a plurality of separation layers and the heatable transfer element receives multiple separation layers of inked images from the imaging element. These are then built up upon the heatable transfer element prior to transferring all of the layers to the print substrate. In some examples, each of the multiple inked images are a different color.

Due at least in part to the transfer element being heatable, a portion of the carrier liquid in the toner is evaporated prior to the transfer of the inked images to the print substrate. This evaporation may also be enhanced by the use of an external heat source. The amount of carrier liquid on the transfer element prior to the transfer onto the print substrate directly affects the quality of the image printed on the substrate. Therefore adequate heating results in a ready finished image in the form of a hot, nearly dry tacky plastic film. This film may then be applied to the print substrate to complete the print operation.

When multiple layers are built up on the heatable transfer element during a one shot color process, the first separation layer may suffer from over-drying in comparison with the later layers. This is because the first layer remains on the heatable transfer element for longer than the subsequent layers, these being transferred to the transfer element at later points in time. In some scenarios, this over-heating may cause poor transferability of the ink from the transfer element to the print substrate and can cause poor adhesion of the ink to the substrate. This can limit media gamut.

In some scenarios, over-drying of lower layers, such as the first layer, can be reduced by specifically configuring the composition of the liquid toners. For example, in one case, the toner properties are adjusted to reduce the evaporation caused by a longer time being spent on the heatable transfer element. In this case, the amount of liquid carrier that is evaporated depends on the properties of the toner. For example, it may be dependent on the particular polymer used, the composition of the carrier liquid and the pigments used. Therefore different toners with different evaporation properties may be used for each separation layer.

In other scenarios, over-drying can be reduced by adjusting the drying level separately for each separation layer by controlling air supply units in a ventilation system. The drying level is adjusted for each separation as a function of the order that the separations are developed on the transfer element. For example, less air may be provided to a first separation layer compared to the final separation layer.

In the present examples, a liquid electrophotographic printer comprising a compressive element is described. Such a liquid electrophotographic printer may reduce over-drying by removing a portion of carrier liquid. The compressive element may be selectively engageable to remove a portion of carrier liquid from an inked image prior to the inked image being transferred to the heatable transfer element. Such a liquid electrophotographic printer also comprises a controller that causes the compressive element to disengage for a first layer of liquid toner so as to retain carrier liquid in the first layer. The controller can engage the compressive element for subsequent layers of liquid toner to remove a portion of carrier fluid from these subsequent layers. This means that the subsequent layers on the transfer element require less of the carrier liquid to be removed through heating and/or other evaporation means, thus reducing over-drying of the first separation layer.

In some examples, the compressive element is already disengaged for a first layer of liquid toner, such that the controller does not need to disengage the compressive element for the first layer. In a disengaged position, the compressive element may be disposed in position away from the imaging element. In some examples, the compressive element is a roller. In one example, the controller can cause the compressive element to remove a greater proportion of carrier fluid from a subsequent layer than for a previous layer. For example, a greater proportion of carrier fluid is removed from the third layer than is removed from the second layer.

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram showing a liquid electrophotographic printer 100 in accordance with an example. Liquid electrophotography, sometimes also known as Digital Offset Color printing, is the process of printing in which liquid toner is applied onto a surface having a pattern of electrostatic charge (i.e. a latent image) to form a pattern of liquid toner corresponding with the electrostatic charge pattern (i.e. an inked image). This pattern of liquid toner is then transferred to at least one intermediate surface, and then to a print medium. During the operation of a digital liquid

electrophotographic system, ink images are formed on the surface of a photo imaging plate. These ink images are transferred to a heatable blanket cylinder and then to a print medium.

According to the example of FIG. 1, a latent image is formed on an imaging element 110 by rotating a clean, bare segment of the photo imaging plate 110 under a photo charging unit (not shown). The imaging element may comprise a photo imaging plate or other image carrier. The imaging element in this example is cylindrical in shape, e.g. is constructed in the form of a drum, and rotates in a direction of arrow 125. The photo charging unit may include a charging device, such as corona wire, a charge roller, scorotron, or any other charging device. A uniform static charge may be deposited on the imaging element 110 by the photo charging unit. As the imaging element 110 continues to rotate, it passes an imaging unit 115 where one or more laser beams may dissipate localised charge in selected portions of the imaging element 110 to leave an invisible electrostatic charge pattern that corresponds to the image to be printed, i.e. a latent image. In some implementations, the photo charging unit applies a negative charge to the surface of the imaging element 110. In other implementations, the charge may be a positive charge. The imaging unit 115 may then locally discharge portions of the imaging element 110, resulting in local neutralised regions on the imaging element 110.

In the described example, ink is transferred onto the imaging element 110 by at least one image development unit 120. An image development unit may also be known as a Binary Ink Developer unit. There may be one image development unit 120 for each ink color. During printing, the appropriate image development unit 120 is engaged with the imaging element 110. The engaged image development unit 120 presents a uniform film of ink to the imaging element 110. The ink contains electrically-charged pigment particles which are attracted to the opposing charges on the image areas of the imaging element 110. The ink is repelled from the uncharged, non-image areas. The imaging element 110 now has a single color ink image on its surface, i.e. an inked image or separation. In other implementations, such as those for black and white (monochromatic) printing, one or more ink developer units may alternatively be provided.

The ink may be a liquid toner, comprising ink particles and a carrier liquid. The carrier liquid may be an imaging oil. An example liquid toner ink is HP ElectroInk™. In this case, pigment particles are incorporated into a resin that is suspended in a carrier liquid, such as Isopar™. The ink particles may be electrically charged such that they move when subjected to an electric field. Typically, the ink particles are negatively charged and are therefore repelled from the negatively charged portions of imaging element 110, and are attracted to the discharged portions of the imaging element 110. The pigment is incorporated into the resin and the compounded particles are suspended in the carrier liquid. The dimensions of the pigment particles are such that the printed image does not mask the underlying texture of the print substrate, so that the finish of the print is consistent with the finish of the print substrate, rather than masking the print substrate. This enables liquid electrophotographic printing to produce finishes closer in appearance to conventional offset lithography, in which ink is absorbed into the print substrate.

Returning to the printing process, the imaging element 110 continues to rotate and transfers the ink image to a heatable transfer element 130. The transfer element 130 may also be known as a blanket cylinder or an intermediate

transfer member and it rotates in a direction of arrow **135**. In use, the transfer element **130** is heated. The transfer of an inked image from the imaging element **110** to the transfer element **130** may be deemed the “first transfer”. Following the transfer of the inked image onto the rotating and heated transfer element **130**, the ink is heated by the transfer element **130**. In certain implementations, the ink may also be heated from an external heat source which may include an air supply. This heating causes the ink particles to partially melt and blend together. At the same time most of the carrier liquid is evaporated and may be collected and reused. In one example case, ink is applied to the transfer element **130** at a concentration of 20% (with the remaining 80% comprising carrier liquid).

As previously discussed, in liquid electrophotography printers employing a one shot color process, the imaging element **110** rotates several times, transferring a succession of separations and building them up on the transfer element **130** before they are transferred to the print substrate. This transfer from the transfer element **130** to the print substrate may be deemed the “second transfer”. Each separation may be a separate color inked image that can be layered on the transfer element **130**. For example, there may be four layers, corresponding to the standard CMYK colors (cyan, magenta, yellow and black), that make up the final image which is transferred to the print substrate.

The print substrate may be any coated or uncoated material suitable for liquid electrophotographic printing, including paper and thin polyurethane or other type of plastic media. In certain examples, the paper comprises a web formed from cellulosic fibers, having a basis weight of from about 75 gsm to about 350 gsm, and a calliper (i.e. thickness) of from about 4 mils (thousandths of an inch-around 0.1 millimeters) to about 200 mils (around 5 millimeters). In certain examples, the paper includes a surface coating comprising starch, an acrylic acid polymer, and an organic material having an hydrophilic-lipophilic balance value of from about 2 to about 14 such as a polyglycerol ester.

The print substrate may be fed on a per sheet basis, or from a roll sometimes referred to as a web substrate. As the print substrate contacts the transfer element **130**, the final image is transferred to the print substrate.

As was discussed above, in the one shot color process an image including multiple separations and/or color layers is acquired on the transfer element **130**. Because the first separations are held for longer periods of time on the heated transfer element **130** as compared to the subsequent additional layers, the first separations may become over-heated and/or dried. This can lead to undesirable image back transfer from the transfer element **130** to the imaging element **110**. It may also negatively affect the first and second transfer performance. Thus if special pre-treatment to the media is not implemented, media gamut is narrow. To mitigate ink dryness, special rubbery blankets were developed with the capacity to absorb large amount of imaging oil and to slow down the drying. These blankets help mitigate ink dryness. But yet, when compared with multi-shot color process, media gamut of one shot color process may be narrower.

Over-drying may be reduced by controlling the carrier liquid concentration in each ink layer prior to the transfer from the imaging element **110** to the transfer element **130**. This can be achieved by having a first layer on the transfer element **130** that has a high carrier liquid concentration and then having subsequent layers on the transfer element **130** with lower concentrations. In the example of FIG. 1, this is achieved by use of a compressive element **140**. The com-

pressive element **140** in some examples is a roller. The compressive element **140** is selectively engagable and is controlled by controller **150**. The controller **150** can engage the compressive element **140** for each subsequent layer of liquid toner so as to remove a portion of carrier liquid from the subsequent layers. The controller **150** may also disengage the compressive element **140** for at least one first layer of liquid toner so as to retain carrier liquid in the first layer. In some examples, the controller **150** ensures that the compressive element **140** is disengaged for at least one first layer, and the action of disengagement may not be required if it is determined that the compressive element **140** is already disengaged. In some examples, the compressive element **140** is mechanically pressed onto the imaging element **110** before the inked image is transferred to the transfer member **130**.

By retaining carrier liquid in at least one first layer and removing carrier liquid from subsequent layers, the over drying of the first layer may be reduced. Depending on the implementation, different separation layers may have different carrier liquid concentrations by selectively engaging the compressive element. In certain cases, the compressive element may be digitally controllable by the controller, i.e. have two or more states that may be selectively controlled for a given separation layer.

In certain cases, this may enable the temperature of transfer member **130** to be reduced because the subsequent layers contain a lower proportion of carrier liquid that would otherwise be present without the engagement of the compressive element **140**. Additionally, external heating or air flow may also be reduced. By reducing the exposure of the multiple layers to heat sources, the first layer is less likely to be over dried, thus enhancing print quality.

FIG. 2A is a schematic diagram **200** showing a first layer of liquid toner **210** applied to a heatable transfer element, such as transfer element **130** in FIG. 1, in accordance with an example. In this example, the layer **210** comprises ink particles **220** and a carrier liquid **230** as previously described.

FIG. 2B is a schematic diagram **205** showing a second layer of liquid toner **240** applied on top of the first layer **210** illustrated in FIG. 2A in accordance with an example. Similarly, the second layer of liquid toner may comprise ink particles **220** and carrier liquid **230**. In some examples the ink particles and carrier liquid are in different concentrations in each layer. In other examples, the type of ink particles and carrier liquid may be different to the type of ink particles and carrier liquid in other layers. In some examples the constituent components of the liquid toner may be chosen specifically to control the evaporation characteristics of the liquid toner, for example to reduce or enhance evaporation of the carrier liquid. Therefore, in some example printers, the controller **150** may engage the compressive element **140** according to the characteristics of the liquid toner. Thus the portion of carrier liquid removed may be dependent on the characteristics of the liquid toner.

FIG. 3A is a schematic diagram **300** showing a compressive element, such as compressive element **140** from FIG. 1, prior to engaging a layer of liquid toner **310** on an imaging element, such as imaging element **110**, in accordance with an example. In some examples, the layer of liquid toner **310** is the second, or any subsequent layer following at least one first layer. In certain cases, there may be a plurality of layers where the compressive element **140** is disengaged prior to the arrival layer of liquid toner **310** as shown in FIG. 3A. The compressive element **140** may be a roller that rotates in the direction shown by arrow **370**, and may be coupled to a

roller mounting **350**. A roller engagement mechanism (not shown) may also be coupled to the roller mounting **350** to selectively apply the roller to the imaging element **110**.

Although the compressive element **140** is shown coupled to the roller mounting **350** and the roller engagement mechanism, one skilled in the art will appreciate that similar mechanisms can be used to allow selective engagement. For example, a standard image development unit engage mechanism can be used with the compressive element **140** to enable selective engagement. Such image development unit engage mechanisms are well known in the art.

In this example, the layer of liquid toner **310** comprises ink particles **320** and liquid carrier **330**. In one example, the liquid toner may comprise 80% liquid carrier **330** and 20% ink particles **320** prior to engaging the compressive element **140**. The layer of liquid toner **310** is formed on the surface of the imaging element **110** which is rotating in the direction indicated by the arrow **360**, such that the layer **310** travels towards the compressive element **140**.

In one example, controller **150** causes the roller engagement mechanism to apply the compressive element **140** to the imaging element **110**, thus causing the compressive element **140** to engage the layer **310**. Thus the engagement system is digitized. For example, the controller **150** may determine that the layer **310** is not the first layer **210**, and is the second layer **240** or any other subsequent layer. Accordingly the controller **150** engages the compressive element **140** so as to remove a portion of carrier liquid **330** from the layer **310**.

In some examples, the compressive element **140** is mechanically pressed onto the imaging plate **110** before transferring the ink to the transfer element **130**. In certain cases, the compressive element **140** may have two or more states, wherein each state has a different nip length and/or nip distance, i.e. the length of imaging element wherein a roller has a distance less than a threshold and/or a set distance at a closest point between a roller and the imaging element **140**.

FIG. 3B is a schematic diagram **305** showing a compressive element **140**, after engaging a layer of liquid toner **310** on an imaging element **110** in accordance with an example. In this illustrated example, the layer **310** can be seen to contain a lower proportion of carrier liquid **330** than prior to engaging the compressive element **140**. The engagement of the compressive element **140** causes a portion of carrier liquid **335** to be removed from the layer **310**. The carrier liquid may be removed by the compressive element **140** using capillary forces.

In some examples, the difference in carrier liquid concentration between the layer **310** going through the compressive element **140** and a layer that does not engage the compressive element **140** is greater than 20%. For example 50% of carrier liquid may be removed by the compressive element **140**.

In some examples, the compressive element **140** is selectively engageable by adjusting one or more of the roller force, the roller pressure, the roller velocity and the roller voltage. Adjusting these values can affect the amount of liquid carrier removed. Other factors that affect the efficiency of carrier liquid removal include the nip length, i.e. the surface area over which the compressive element **140** and the imaging element **110** are engaged. Nip length can be affected by the hardness of the rollers, and the force and pressure applied during the engagement. Other factors affecting efficiency include the relative velocity between the imaging element **110** and the compressive element **140**, their diameters and the roller formulation. For example, the

thickness of the rubber coating on the roller can affect the efficiency of carrier liquid removal, as well as the surface roughness. In some cases the roller is uncoated. In some examples the compressive element **140** is made from polyurethane. Some or all of these operational parameters may be adjusted so as to control the proportion of liquid carrier that is removed from the imaging element **110**. The adjustment of these operational parameters may depend on the particular layer of liquid toner and/or the constituent components of the particular layer of liquid toner. For example, a greater proportion of carrier liquid may be removed from the outer layers as compared to the inner layers.

In some examples, a voltage is applied to the compressive element **140** during engagement. By utilizing proper electrical voltage, the compressive element **140** may remove carrier liquid while at the same time compressing the ink particles onto the imaging element **110**. Thus the compressive element **140** takes advantage of the electrical charge of the ink, whereby the ink carries with it the voltage of the image development unit **120**. The measured ink voltage may be a function of coverage on the imaging element **110**. It should be noted that the voltage applied to the compressive element **140** does not affect the uncharged carrier liquid.

In one example, the voltage applied to the compressive element **140** may be of the same polarity as the ink particles and the imaging element **110**, and is different to a voltage of the ink particles in an inked image such that an electrostatic force is applied to retain the ink particles against the imaging element **110**. Thus the ink is repelled by the compressive element **140** and compressed against the imaging element **110**. The applied voltage may be controlled by the controller **150** and in some examples is chosen according to the particular liquid toner being used and/or the ink coverage. The voltage may be different to a voltage of the imaging element **110** such that an electrostatic force is applied to residue charges to transfer said charges to the compressive element **140**. The residue charges may make up unwanted noise in the image and may be in a non-image area of the imaging element **110**.

In one example, the ink particles are negatively charged, so the voltage applied to the compressive element **140** is negative. When the voltage applied to the compressive element is lower than the voltage of the ink particles in the inked image and is higher than the voltage of the imaging element **110**, the ink is compressed against the imaging element **110** and the residue charges in the background are transferred to the compressive element **140**. In another example the ink particles are positively charged and the voltage applied to the compressive element **140** is positive. When the voltage applied to the compressive element **140** is higher than the voltage of the ink particles in the inked image and is lower than the voltage of the imaging element **110**, the ink is compressed against the imaging element **110** and the residue charges in the background are transferred to the compressive element **140**. For example, when the ink particles are negatively charged, the compressive element **140** voltage may be -800V , the ink particle voltage may be -500V and the imaging element **110** voltage (which corresponds to the image background) is -900V . In such a scenario the ink particles are forced onto the imaging element **110**, and any residual charges on the imaging element **110** are attracted to the compressive element **140**. By applying voltages to the compressive element **140** and the imaging element **110**, image quality can be enhanced. In another example, for negatively charged ink particles, the voltage applied to the compressive element is -700V and the ink particle voltage is -450V . This means that the ink

particles are compressed against the imaging element **110** and the residue charges in the background are transferred to the compressive element **140**.

FIG. 3C is a schematic diagram **355** showing a disengaged compressive element **140** for a layer of liquid toner **315** on an imaging element **110** in accordance with an example. In this example, the layer **315** is the first layer **210**. The controller **150** may determine that the layer **315** is the first layer **210** and disengage the compressive element **140** so as to retain carrier liquid in the first layer **315**, **210**. In some examples, the compressive element **140** may already be disengaged, such that controller **150** may not disengage compressive element **140**. In certain cases, the compressive element **140** may be disengaged for a plurality of first layers, e.g. two or three color separations in a set of three or more separations. In certain cases, monochrome layers may also be used. In some examples, the compressive element **140** is in an disengaged position away from the imaging element **110** for a first layer **210** of liquid carrier applied to the imaging element **110**, and the compressive element **140** is in an engaged position for a subsequent layer **240** of liquid carrier applied to the imaging element.

FIG. 4 is a more detailed schematic diagram showing a liquid electrophotographic printer **400** comprising a variable air supply **470** in accordance with an example. An example system for adjusting the air supply applied to evaporate carrier liquid is described in U.S. Pat. No. 7,907,873 and is incorporated herein by reference.

Printer **400**, in use, comprises a photo imaging plate **410**, rotating in the direction indicated by arrow **425** and a heated blanket **430**, rotating in the direction indicated by arrow **435**. The printer **400** further comprises a photo charging unit **460** and one or more lasers **415** as discussed in accordance with printer **100** of FIG. 1. The printer **400** further comprises a plurality of image development units **420A-D**, as well as a roller **440** in communication with controller **450**. The controller **450** may also be in communication with the variable air supply **470**. The printer may also comprise a cleaning station **480** and a pre-transfer erase unit **490**.

The pre-transfer erase unit **490** comprises a set of diodes to illuminate the photo imaging plate **410**. Illumination causes a homogeneous conductivity across the photo imaging plate **410** leading to dissipation of the charges still existing on the background. This enables a clean transfer of the image in the next stage avoiding the background charges from sparking to the heated blanket **430** and damaging the image and, in time, the photo imaging plate **410** and the heated blanket **430**.

The cleaning station **480** is used to remove any residual ink on the photo imaging plate **410** after the second transfer has taken place. The cleaning station **480** may also cool the photo imaging plate **410** from heat transferred during contact with the hot blanket of the heated blanket **430**. The photo imaging plate **410** is then ready to be recharged by the charging unit **460** ready for the next image.

The variable air supply unit **470** may be used to apply air to the layers acquired on the heated blanket **430**. This air acts to dry the images as the multiple separations are acquired. Often, air from the variable air supply units **470** is applied during the entire printing process and sometimes null cycles are added to further dry the image. Null cycles are revolutions of the ITM **430** wherein no further layers are acquired, thus allowing the air supply to sufficiently dry the layer. The use of null cycles for subsequent layers further increases the time at least one first layer spends on the heated blanket **430**, which can lead to over-drying. Thus by selectively control-

ling and adjusting the drying level of the variable air supply **470** for each layer, over-drying of the first layer can be reduced.

In one example, the controller **450** may control the variable air supply unit **470** to provide less air to a first printed separation layer as compared to a final printed separation. In some examples, the controller **450** may control the variable air supply **470** to provide less air flow to an image with a lower percentage coverage as compared to an image with a high percentage coverage. The controller **450** can thus control the drying level of the variable air supply unit **470** as a function of the order that the separations are developed on the heated blanket **430** and/or the percent coverage of each separation. The controller **450** may also control the drying level as a function of the intended print substrate on which the image is to be printed, and/or the operational parameters of the roller **440** discussed earlier.

In some examples, the variable air supply unit **470** may also include a heating system to control the temperature and humidity levels in the supplied air. This heating system can also be controlled by the controller **450**.

In some examples, the controller **450** can instruct the variable air supply **470** to operate with a first set of air supply parameters for the first layer and with a second set of air supply parameters for a combination of the first and second layers. In one example, the first set of air supply parameters provide a slower drying rate than the second set of parameters. An example set of air supply parameters may mean that the variable air supply **470** supplies no air to the layer(s), or that the air is diverted away from the heated blanket **430**. One or more air supply parameters may also control the heating system in the variable air supply unit **470**. For example, the second set of air supply parameters may provide a higher temperature air flow as compared to the first set of air supply parameters.

In another example, the controller **450** can instruct the variable air supply **470** to supply air at a first speed for the first layer and to supply air at a second speed for a combination of the first and second layers. In one example, the second speed is higher than the first speed. The first speed may also be zero, such that substantially no air flows onto the first layer. Subsequent layers may also be subjected to air supplied at various air speeds. In some examples, subsequent layers experience higher air speeds than previous layers.

In some examples the roller **440** and the variable air supply unit **470** operate in tandem for better performance at reducing over-drying. The controller **450** may control the variable air supply unit **470** based on the engagement level of the roller **440**. For example, the controller **450** may determine that removing carrier liquid is more efficient for a particular layer using the roller **440**, and may accordingly reduce the drying and/or heating level of the variable air supply unit **470**, or vice-versa. This determination may be dependent on the layer number, or the particular liquid toner being used.

FIG. 5 is a flow diagram showing a method **500** of printing an image in a liquid electrophotographic printer according to an example. The method can be performed by the printer **100**, **400** discussed in FIGS. 1 and 4. At block **510** a first layer of liquid toner is applied to an imaging element such as a photo imaging plate. This may be imaging element **110** or photo imaging plate **410**. In this example, the liquid toner comprises charged pigment or ink particles and a liquid carrier. The ink may be applied by an ink development unit **120**, **420A-D** described above in relation to FIGS. 1 and 4, or by some other means. At block **520**, the liquid carrier

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is retained in the first layer by removing a roller from the photo imaging plate. The roller may comprise compressive element **140** or roller **440**. For example, the roller may be disengaged by a controller **150, 450** as described above with reference to FIGS. **1** and **4**. At block **530**, the first layer is transferred to a heated blanket, such as transfer element **130** or heated blanket **430**. In some examples the heated blanket is formed on, or is part of an intermediate transfer member. At block **540**, a second layer of liquid toner is applied to the photo imaging plate. The second layer of liquid toner may be a different color layer and/or separation to the first layer. At block **550**, a portion of the liquid carrier in the second layer is removed from the photo imaging plate by applying the roller to the photo imaging plate. The application of the roller may be controlled by controller **150, 450**. At block **560**, the second layer is transferred to the heated blanket. In this example, the second layer is applied to the heated blanket on top of the first layer. At block **570**, the first and second layers are transferred from the heated blanket to a print medium. Step **580** indicates that blocks **540, 550** and **560** may be repeated for further layers of liquid toner such that in step **570**, the multiple layers are transferred to the print medium.

In some example methods, retaining the liquid carrier and removing a portion of the liquid carrier in blocks **520** and **550** respectively, comprise adjusting one or more operational parameters for the roller so as to control a proportion of liquid carrier that is removed from the photo imaging plate. For example, these operation parameters may include one or more of the roller force, the roller pressure, the roller velocity and the roller voltage.

In some example methods, an electrical bias can be applied to the roller so as to repel charged pigment particles from the roller and to attract residue charges from the photo imaging plate. This electrical bias can be controlled by applying and/or adjusting the roller voltage.

In some example methods, subsequent to transferring the first layer to the heated blanket, the method comprises applying a first air flow to the heated blanket, and subsequent to transferring the second layer to a heated blanket, the second layer being transferred onto the first layer on the heated blanket, the method comprises applying a second air flow to the heated blanket. For example, the second air flow results in a faster ink-layer drying rate than the first air flow. In some examples, the first air flow involves no air flowing onto the heated blanket. The air flow may be provided by a variable air supply **470** as described in FIG. **4**.

In some example methods, before transferring the first and second layers from the heated blanket to the print medium, the method further comprises applying an additional layer of liquid toner to the photo imaging plate; removing a portion of the liquid carrier in the additional layer from the photo imaging plate by applying the roller to the photo imaging plate; and transferring the additional layer to the heated blanket. These additional steps are shown in FIG. **5**, in loop **580** and can be repeated for any number of additional layers. In some examples, a proportion of liquid carrier removed with respect to the additional layer is greater than a proportion of liquid carrier removed with respect to the second layer, and each additional layer is transferred onto a previously transferred layer. In this example the method step of transferring the first and second layers from the heated blanket to a print medium shown in block **570** comprises transferring a combination of all transferred layers from the heated blanket to the print medium.

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As discussed, the method operations of applying, removing and transferring are repeated for one or more additional layers, where each layer may represent a different color separation.

Certain system components and methods described herein may be implemented by way of non-transitory computer program code that is storable on a non-transitory storage medium. In some examples, the controller **150, 450** may comprise a non-transitory computer readable storage medium comprising a set of computer-readable instructions stored thereon. The controller **150, 450** may further comprise a processor. The computer-readable instructions may, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to disengage the compressive element **140, 440** for a first layer of liquid toner developed on the imaging element **110, 410** so as to retain carrier liquid in said first layer, and engage the compressive element **140, 440** for a subsequent layer of liquid toner developed on the imaging element **110, 410** so as to remove a portion of carrier liquid from said subsequent layer.

What is claimed is:

1. A printer comprising:

an imaging element;

an image development unit to deposit layers of liquid toner onto the imaging element, wherein each layer of the liquid toner comprises ink particles and a carrier liquid;

a compressive element to be selectively engaged with the imaging element;

a controller to:

for a first layer of liquid toner deposited on the imaging element, disengage the compressive element from the imaging element so as to retain the carrier liquid of the first layer of liquid toner on the imaging element, and

for a second, subsequent layer of liquid toner deposited on the imaging element, engage the compressive element with the imaging element so as to remove a portion of the carrier liquid of the second layer from the imaging element; and

a heatable transfer element to receive the first and second layers of liquid toner from the imaging element to form an inked image and transfer the inked image to a print substrate.

2. The printer of claim **1**, wherein the controller is to: transfer the first layer of liquid toner from the imaging element to the heatable transfer element before the second layer is deposited onto the imaging element, and

transfer the second layer of liquid toner from the imaging element to the heatable transfer element after the compressive element has removed a portion of the carrier liquid of the second layer from the imaging element.

3. The printer of claim **1**, wherein a voltage is applied to the compressive element during engagement with the imaging element to cause the ink particles pressed against the imaging element while the compressive element removes a portion of the carrier liquid from the imaging element.

4. The printer of claim **3**, wherein to cause the ink particles pressed against the imaging element:

if the ink particles are charged with a negative charge, the voltage applied to the compressive element is lower than the charge of the ink particles; and

if the ink particles are charged with a positive charge, the voltage applied to the compressive element is higher than the charge of the ink particles.

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5. The printer of claim 1, comprising:
a variable air supply for drying layers of the inked image present on the heatable transfer element,
wherein the controller is to cause the variable air supply to operate with a first set of air supply parameters for the first layer and with a second set of air supply parameters for a combination of the first and second layers, and
wherein the first set of air supply parameters provide a slower drying rate than the second set of air supply parameters.
6. The printer of claim 5, wherein the controller is to cause the variable air supply to supply air at a first speed for the first layer and to supply air at a second speed, higher than the first speed, for the combination of the first and second layers.
7. The printer of claim 1, wherein the compressive element comprises a roller.
8. The printer of claim 7, wherein the controller is to adjust the engagement of the compressive element with the imaging element by adjusting one or more of:
a roller force;
a roller pressure;
a roller velocity; and
a roller voltage.
9. A method of printing an image in a printer that comprises a roller and a photo imaging element, comprising:
applying a first layer of liquid toner to the imaging element, the liquid toner comprising ink particles and a liquid carrier;
retaining the liquid carrier in the first layer by disengaging the roller from the photo imaging element;
subsequent to the first layer, applying a second layer of liquid toner to the photo imaging element;
removing a portion of the liquid carrier in the second layer from the photo imaging element by engaging the roller with the photo imaging element; and
transferring an image formed by the first and second layers of liquid toner on the imaging element to a print medium.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein transferring the image to the print medium includes:
transferring the first layer of liquid toner from the photo imaging element to a heatable transfer element before applying the second layer of liquid toner to the photo imaging element;
after removing a portion of the liquid carrier in the second layer from the photo imaging element, transferring the second layer from the photo imaging element to the heatable transfer element; and
transferring the first and second layers from the heatable transfer element to the print medium.
11. The method of claim 10, comprising:
subsequent to transferring the first layer to the heatable transfer element, applying a first air flow to the heatable transfer element; and
subsequent to transferring the second layer to the heatable transfer element, applying a second air flow to the heatable transfer element,

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- wherein the second air flow results in a faster ink-layer drying rate than the first air flow.
12. The method of claim 10, comprising, before transferring the first and second layers from the heatable transfer element to the print medium:
applying a third layer of liquid toner to the photo imaging element;
removing a portion of the liquid carrier in the third layer from the photo imaging element by engaging the roller with the photo imaging element; and
transferring the third layer to the heatable transfer element,
wherein the portion of liquid carrier removed from the third layer is greater than the portion of liquid carrier removed from the second layer.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein the first, second, and third layers represent different colors of the image.
14. The method of claim 9, wherein removing a portion of the liquid carrier comprise:
adjusting an operational parameter for the roller so as to control the portion of the liquid carrier being removed from the photo imaging plate.
15. The method of claim 9, comprising:
applying an electrical bias voltage to the roller so as to repel the ink particles on the photo imaging element from the roller and attract residue charges from the photo imaging element.
16. An apparatus for modifying a portion of liquid carrier applied to an imaging element in a printer comprising:
a roller; and
an engagement mechanism coupled to the roller to:
for a first layer of liquid carrier applied to the imaging element, disengage the roller from the imaging element to retain the liquid carrier in the first layer on the imaging element, and
for a second layer of liquid carrier applied to the imaging element subsequent to the first layer, engage the roller with the imaging element to remove a portion of the liquid carrier in the second layer from the imaging element.
17. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein, during the engagement of the roller with the imaging element, the engagement mechanism is to apply an electrical bias voltage to the roller so as to repel ink particles on the imaging element from the roller and attract residue charges from the imaging element.
18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein:
if the ink particles are charged with a negative charge, the electrical bias voltage applied to the roller is lower than the charge of the ink particles and higher than a voltage of the imaging element; and
if the ink particles are charged with a positive charge, the electrical bias voltage applied to the roller is higher than the charge of the ink particles and lower than the voltage of the imaging element.

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